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### DM Hiring Down



By *Melissa Campanelli*, Editor-In-Chief, eM+C Magazine

Just when you thought it was safe...

While the economy has been a thorn in everyone's side over the past few weeks, we have heard some encouraging words about the online and digital marketing world. Online sales are up, we've heard, and digital marketing may increase in a recession. So all wasn't so bad.

But in my inbox this morning, I was greeted with a real clunker: According to a press release from [Berhart Associates Executive Search](#), continued layoffs and more hiring freezes appear to be on the horizon for direct marketers this spring.

According to the latest Bernhart Associates employment survey, 54 percent of the companies responding said they will be filling new positions during the current spring quarter, down from 58 percent last quarter. The percentage of companies that have imposed a hiring freeze jumped to 19 percent, compared with 13 percent last quarter and more than double the rate just six months ago. Planned layoffs remained unchanged at 12 percent.

A total of 129 companies responded to the random survey that was e-mailed the week of April 1.

Jerry Bernhart, owner of the Owatonna, Minn.-based search firm that conducted the survey insists, however, that there is some good news in all of this.

"If you look at what's going on now and compare it with what happened during the last downturn in 2001-2002, things are still holding up better on the jobs front," said Bernhart, in the release. "All of our indicators were weaker back then. Direct marketers this time around are turning more to hiring freezes and doing what they can to avoid significant cutbacks in staff. They know that when things

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turn around, talent will be more difficult to come-by."

Even in the current environment, said Bernhart, many companies are still having a challenging time finding qualified candidates for certain positions. "Nearly three-quarters of those responding said they are having some degree of difficulty filling openings," said Bernhart. "For the most part, these jobs are more specialized lower to mid-level positions, or they are in geographic locations where the available direct marketing labor pool is relatively small."

When asked what positions will be in greatest demand during the coming three months, Bernhart said sales dominated the list. "This is similar to what we saw during the last downturn. Many companies apparently believe that a good way to weather an economic downturn is to increase the effectiveness of their sales force, and that's exactly what

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